

Bring Comfort During Crisis

No Drama for Volunteers

By JOAN KENT

Manning a City Hall telephone is not especially dramatic.

Nor is serving coffee from a Red Cross canteen.

But humdrum volunteer work such as that brought mental and physical comfort to those people involved in New Orleans' Bloody Sunday and to people all over the country who were concerned about friends and relatives.

Between repeated evacuations from a 10th floor office on the Loyola Avenue side of City Hall, City Desk Answer Desk volunteers answered calls to an emergency number that rang off the hook night and day.

Most callers wanted to know about guests and employees of the Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge, reports Margie Stich, Answer Desk director. Working with people in the mayor's office, volunteers tracked down those who had been in the hotel and relayed information to callers.

They also listened to the many callers who wanted to give suggestions for getting the snipers. And they answered hundreds of questions — "Which downtown offices will be open?" "What expressways are safe?" "What routes leading out of town are open?"

In the mayor's office, volunteers coordinated efforts with the Salvation Army and local department stores to get clothing for hotel evacuees. According to Janice Deagan, who worked that detail, the Salvation Army underwrote the cost of coats, sleepwear and other essentials from stores. Department store managers cooperated — one kept his back door open all night. Another had clothing delivered to a family housed in an uptown hotel.

Volunteers took care of a myriad of details, such as prescriptions for medicines left in the hotel and money for those who left all their cash.

At three Red Cross canteens situated in the area of the tragedy, volunteers served 12 gallons of coffee, 32 dozen doughnuts, 2,000 sandwiches and 48 gallons of hot chocolate. And they provided blankets for law officers.

Humdrum work. But, said Mrs. Stich, "these efforts to help were heartening in the sadness of these two days."